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'61 C.I.A. Poison Plot Reported Against 3 Top Leaders in Cuba

By JOHN M. CREWDSOON
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WASHINGTON, June 18.—The Central Intelligence Agency organized an attempt in early 1961 to poison Premier Fidel Castro, his younger brother, Raul, and Che Guevara, according to a source who claims direct knowledge of the operation.

The C.I.A.'s plot was directed against the three Cuban political figures, according to the source, because the agency believed that they would be capable of rallying Cuba against a counterrevolutionary invasion—the Bay of Pigs operation—then being planned.

The triple assassination plot, the source said, was conceived in the latter half of 1960 under the Eisenhower Administration and directed by Sam Giancana and John Roselli, two alleged organized crime figures recruited by the C.I.A. as middlemen for the job.

Several reports have been published recently about three C.I.A.-inspired attempts on Mr. Castro's life around the time of the April 15, 1961, invasion at the Bay of Pigs. But the source's account is the first that has included other revolutionary leaders as targets, suggesting that the C.I.A. hoped to create a power vacuum in Cuba to foster confusion and disorientation following the invasion.

A second source who has seen C.I.A. documents relating to political assassinations, while declining to provide any

corroborative details, said that at least one of the reported attempts concerning Cuba was "more complex than just Castro."

According to the source with direct knowledge, planning for the triple murder plot began in the latter half of 1960, before the election of John F. Kennedy as President in November of that year, and the unsuccessful attempt was made in late March or early April of the following year.

The source could not say, however, whether approval for the operation had been sought or received from higher-level officials of the Eisenhower or Kennedy Administration outside the C.I.A.

The C.I.A. project officer in the case, he said, was Sheffield Edwards, a former military aide who, before retiring, served as head of the C.I.A.'s Office of Security.

Mr. Edwards appeared as a witness several weeks ago before a closed session of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities. Repeated efforts to reach him for comment on his alleged role in the operation were unsuccessful.

Maheu Role Reported

Mr. Edwards, the source said, enlisted Robert A. Maheu, a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, until 1970, a top aide to Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire, to serve as the C.I.A.'s liaison with the criminal underworld figures selected to arrange the murders.

Mr. Maheu, who recently invoked the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination in declining to testify before the Senate committee about his C.I.A. relationship, reportedly sought out Mr. Roselli, whom he knew, and through him gained the cooperation of Mr. Giancana, then a leading organized crime figure in the Chicago area who had financial interests in prerevolutionary Cuba.

Mr. Maheu, Mr. Roselli and Mr. Giancana, the source said, were moved to Miami Beach to oversee the multiple assassination attempt. Mr. Giancana was installed in a suite at the Fontainebleau Hotel.

Mr. Roselli, the source said, was put in touch by the C.I.A. with a Cuban assassin on the island who agreed to attempt to poison in a single stroke the Castro brothers and Mr. Guevara, a revolutionary folk hero who then headed the National Bank of Cuba.

The would-be assassin reported back to his superiors, however, according to the source, that he had been unable to get close enough to the three men when they were taking a meal together to accomplish the job, and the man reportedly was then whisked out of Cuba by prearrangement shortly before the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The poison to have been used in the attempt reportedly was supplied to Mr. Roselli by the C.I.A. and was described as a slow-acting compound designed to leave no trace of its presence.

Three Attempts Reported

One well-informed Government official said that the C.I.A. had acknowledged to Administration investigators three separate attempts to murder Mr. Castro, two of them involving poison and the third a bullet from a high-powered rifle.

It could not be learned, however, whether all of the plots, or only the one described by the source, had also been directed at Raul Castro and Mr. Guevara. The latter was killed in October, 1967, by Bolivian soldiers who had been trained by American counterinsurgency experts.

The Senate committee voted last week to seek a limited grant of immunity from Federal prosecution for Mr. Maheu, who could be compelled, if the grant is approved by the courts, to tell what he knows about the affair under the threat of being held in contempt of Congress.

CASTRO, Fidel

CASTRO, Raul

GUEVARA, Che

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